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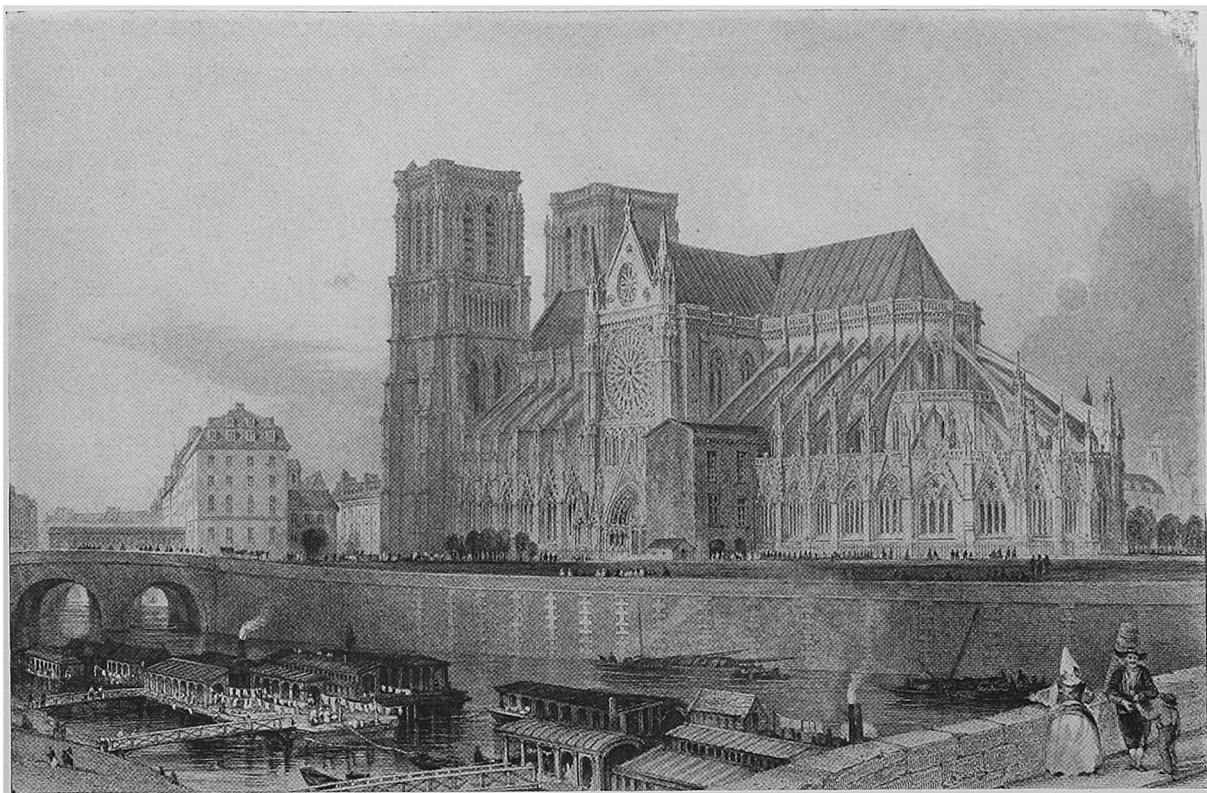
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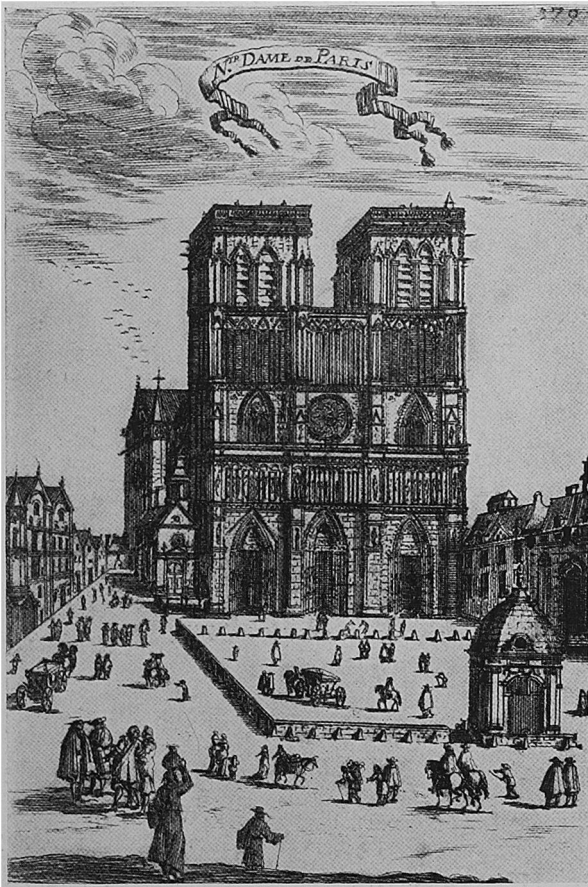
NOTRE DAME. FROM AN ENGRAVING BY JOHN BYRNE, AFTER A DRAWING BY FREDERICK NASH

Notre Dame in Literature

BY ARTHUR BARTLETT MAURICE

IN a great measure the history of Notre Dame is the history of France. In the Fourth Century, in the forty-seventh year of the reign of King Childebert, a cathedral was built. It was the first Church of Our Lady in Paris, and handed down this title to the great cathedral which replaced it in the Twelfth century. Formally linking it to history are the ceremonies of which it has been the scene; the marriage of Francis II and Marie Stuart in 1552; the marriage of Henri of Navarre, "le bon roi Henri" whom the Parisians still adore, and Marguerite of Valois, the wayward and wholly fascinating lady who composed the *Heptameron*, upon a platform erected outside the porch so that Henri's Protestantism might not contaminate the sacred edifice,

six days before Saint Bartholemew flamed in bloody fury"; the coronation of Napoleon by Pope Pius VII in 1804; the marriage of Louis-Napoleon in 1853, and the baptism of the Prince Imperial in 1857. These are conspicuous mile stones on the way. But the Gothic heart of Notre Dame is more than a factor or background of history; it is history itself. In that splendid Paris which thrills, delights, and amazes the visitor of today there are structures and squares which impress the traveller from the new world with a sense of antiquity, but which to the critical eyes of Notre Dame must seem the veriest of upstarts. She herself was built for a little Gothic capital, and a huge metropolis has outgrown her. Hilaire Belloc has compared her to a lady grown old in a great house, about whose



THE FACADE OF NOTRE DAME. FROM A SEVENTEENTH CENTURY ENGRAVING

age new phrases and strange habits have arisen, who is surrounded by the youth of her own lineage, and yet is content to hear and understand without replying to their speech; silent in the midst of energy, forgotten in the many activities of the household, yet still the centre of the estate.

Among the spirits which in imagination return from the dust of centuries to renew in the shadow of the great cathedral the associations of the past are those of kings and captains, statesmen and thundering prelates, and scribes, who, though lightly considered in their own times, have outlived the ephemeral mighty before whom they cringed in the matter of perpetuating for posterity "toutes les gloires de la France," and in some cases the glories of other lands. There is hardly a name in the roll of French letters from the Twelfth century to the Fifteenth, which

is not in some measure linked with Notre Dame and the old Scholars Quarter which it dominated in the Middle Ages, and hardly a poet or romancer or playwright of modern times who has not occasionally turned to the cathedral and the streets about it to draw direct inspiration from the trophied and mysterious past. Notre Dame means Abelard and Heloise, and Dante, and Boileau, and Fénelon, and Molière and Corneille, and Balzac and Hugo and Eugene Sue, and Robert Louis Stevenson.

All around the northern and eastern sides of the original Notre Dame stretched Gothic arched cloisters, where the Church taught its scholars, and there, toward the end of the Eleventh century, Pierre Abelard was a pupil of Guillaume de Champeaux. The chapter of Notre Dame owned nearly all the eastern end of the Ile de la Cité and had built up a clerical village of some forty small houses, each within its own garden. In one of these houses facing the river, on what is now known as the Quai aux Fleurs, dwelt, in 1118, seventy years before the present cathedral was begun, Abelard and Heloise.

In the shadow of Notre Dame Boccaccio was born, and Dante lived for a vague year or two in the period of his exile. Balzac, in a fragment of romance, placed Dante's Paris home in one of the small houses just to the east of the cathedral, thence ferrying him over to the Quai de la Tournelle, whence the Italian strolled to his lectures. In the cloisters which, some hundred years before, had seen Abelard at his books, Boileau-Despreux lived for many years, and there died. There he gave himself over to the composition of the occasional poems which did not greatly augment the fame won in earlier life by the publication of *L'Art Poétique* and *Le Lutrin*. Scribes of the church and scribes not of the church found in the cloisters the quiet so conducive to literary creation. At nightfall the gates to the river were safely closed and barred against the intrusion of the noisy world. In the Seventeenth century, somewhat before Boileau's time,



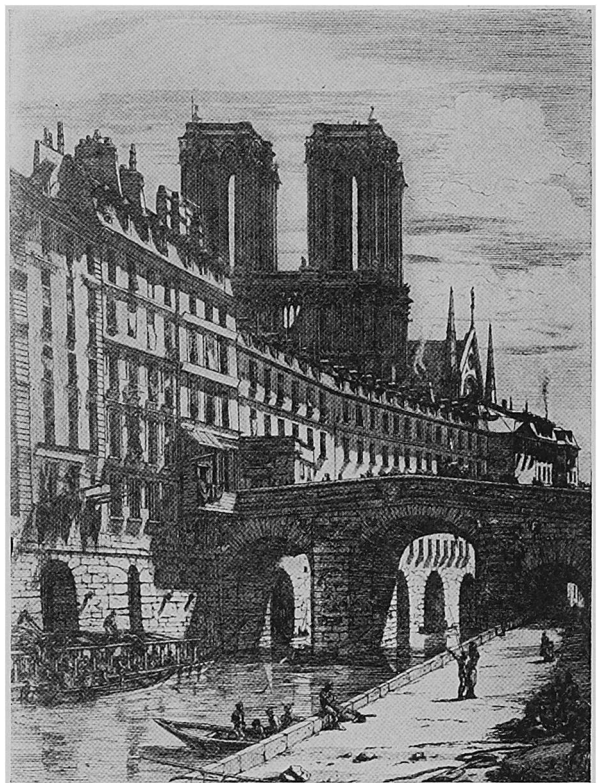
NOTRE DAME AND THE PONT ROUGE. FROM AN OLD ENGRAVING. BY WESTLEY, AFTER A DRAWING BY J. NASH

the Pont Rouge of the accompanying illustration, the predecessor of the Pont St. Louis of our day, was built. The literary ecclesiasts of the cloisters objected to the crossing of the river being made at the narrowest point lest they be disturbed by the resulting traffic, so the bridge was made to turn at an angle, until it set its twisted feet on the retired spot where now the Rue des Ursins and the Rue des Chantres meet in a small open space. It was known as the "Red Bridge" because of the fact that, built of wood, it was painted with red lead to preserve it from rot. In the first years of the Regency it had to be rebuilt on account of an accident, and at last, at the beginning of the Revolution, this curious monument of special literary and ecclesiastical privilege and of the incongruity of old Paris was swept away by a flood.

Paris was born in the Isle of the Seine, whose shape is that of a cradle. Sauval said: "The isle of the City is fashioned like a great ship sunk in the slime and stranded at the surface of the water, in the middle of the Seine." Then there is Georges Cain, of the Carnavalet Museum proclaiming: "But the glory of the City is Notre Dame! Let us follow the winding, picturesque Rue Chanein-esse, where the great Balzac lodged Madame de la Chanterie, and, at No. 18, let us climb the tottering staircase of the Dagebert Tower, and old and precious débris of the canonical build-ings that once enclosed the Cathedral

of Paris. A few dozen worn-down steps will bring us to a narrow platform whence we shall behold an admirable sight.

"Notre Dame, radiantly beautiful, rises, like a large stone flower, from a mass of flat roofs, grey or blue, and the majestic outlines of its towers stand out in their immensity against the horizon. Beneath every caprice of the hour or light, whether the sun gilds this splendor or its carvings are mantled in snow, while a carpet of spotless flakes stretches below, whether the flaming sky frames its violet bulk in melting gold or the storm wraps it in its copper clouds, ever the noble cathedral appears in its shining beauty and unsurpassed splendor. The spire that completes it shoots clearly and proudly into the air, and flights of crows whirl, with shrill cawings, round the blossoming roots of the Paris Basilic. Over there, above a dazzling view of carvings, chimneys, gables, bridges, steeples, and streets, the far-off azures melt into soft tints, and finally mingle, on the



LE PETIT PONT, NOTRE DAME IN DISTANCE. FROM AN ETCHING BY CHARLES MERYON



LE STRYGE. ONE OF THE GARGOYLES OF NOTRE DAME.
FROM THE ETCHING BY CHARLES MERYON

horizon, in a vague coloring; the beasts of the Apocalypse, which the talented artists of times gone by have poised on the tower balustrades, bend grimacingly and jeeringly over the vast Paris that feverishly lives and moves below!"

But less the talented artists of times gone by who modelled them do those monsters grinning down upon Paris suggest, than Victor Hugo who has lent them an added immortality with his pen, and Charles Méryon who has etched them for the world with his marvellous pencil. The gargoyles of the towers are for those who gaze upon them with mortal eye. The hunchback Quasimode of the Hugo romance and Le Stryge of the Méryon drawing have gone forth, beyond the walls of Lutetia, beyond the coasts and frontiers of France, carrying to the world their message of wonderment and charm. Look down beyond the foreground of Le Stryge, past the cawing crows, to behold a city startlingly like the Fifteenth

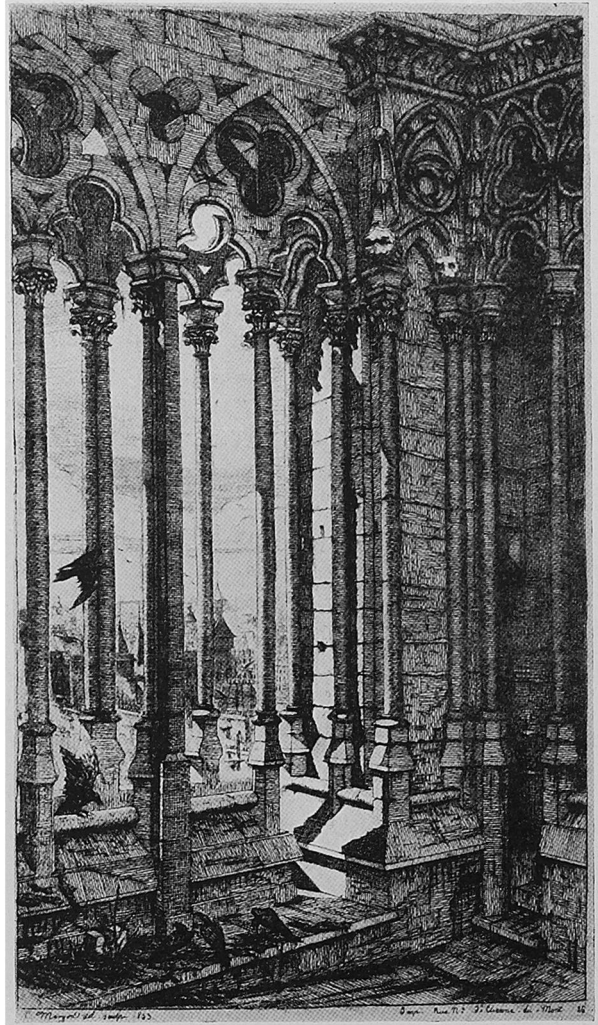
century city that Victor Hugo reconstructed in the pages of *Notre Dame*. Indeed, the descriptive words of the novel almost fit the etching.

It is a far cry from that city of Quasimode and Claude Frolle and Esmerelda and Captain Phoebus to the town of the eighteen-seventies through which Robert Louis Stevenson so delighted to wander. Yet Notre Dame of the Fifteenth century meant more to the picturesque Scotsman than all the cathedrals of Great Britain combined. He saw it with the eyes of François Villon, whose vagabondage he pictured so vividly in *A Lodging for the Night*. To him the characters of the Hugo romance were keenly alive, and above all was the cathedral itself, the dominating protagonist. "Old Paris" he recorded of the book, "lives for us with newness of life; we have ever before our eyes the city cut into three by the two arms of the river, the boat shaped island 'moored' by five bridges to the different shores, and the two unequal towns on either hand. . . . We carry away with us a sense of the 'Gothic' profile of the city, of the 'surprising forest of pinnacles and towers and belfries,' and we know not what of rich and intricate and quaint. And throughout, Notre Dame has been held up over Paris by a height far greater than that of its twin towers: the cathedral is present to us from the first page to the last. . . . And then Hugo has peopled this Gothic city, and, above all, this Gothic church, with a race of men even more distinctly Gothic than their surroundings."

In that series of spirited romances in which the good Dumas carried his splendour "Four" from the fiery morning of life to the gradually falling evening when the lights were extinguished, and the heroes passed away one by one and in the Valois trilogy revolving about Chicot the Jester, Notre Dame looms like a beacon on a hill. Forever, in their journeys to and fro between the right bank and the left the Musketeers were passing in its shadow, their spurs jingling and the scabbards of their long rapiers

clanging against the rough cobblestones of the narrow streets that clustered at the cathedral's base. Those streets, which had known the hunchback of the Hugo tale, and Chicot, and d'Artagnan, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, survived to figure in the *Comédie Humaine* of Honoré de Balzac, and to furnish the stupendous setting of the scene for Eugene Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris*. The twin towers still jutted up from a mediaeval tangle when Hugo and Balzac and Sue and Méryon knew them, and found in them inspiration. The maze of narrow alleys about Notre Dame in October 1838, when Rodolphe, Grand Duke of Gerolstein, found Fleur-de-Marie, and the Slasher and the Schoolmaster and the Ogress, was known as the Mint. Here, under the wing of Notre Dame, the Fifteenth century, which had defied the Sixteenth and the Seventeenth and the Eighteenth, persisted into the Nineteenth. Here, little changed, was the old Paris of Villon and of Quasimode.

Quasimode and the priest Frolle in the tower; the girl Esmerelda and her goat in the square below; the Villon of actual existence or better still, of the Stevensonian tale, slinking furtively in the shadows! These are but a few of that vast company yonder in the Valhalla of romance, who, if brought back to earth, would turn instant eyes to the twin towers and the splendid façade. So many of them are there that they would stretch beyond the longest evening shadow. So many that the reverent Pilgrim before or within the ancient structure must choose those of Fable Land who happen to be nearest and dearest to his heart. In that spirit the present Pilgrim sees in imagination the Tartuffe of Molière, planning fresh villainies while apparently engaged in prayer, or M. Jourdain, the "Bourgeois Gentilhomme," making his way through the narrow streets meditating on the new discovery that all his life he has talked prose without know it, or Aramis, the dainty friend of duchesses, answering in the dim aisles to the call that will temporarily convert



LE GALERIE OF NOTRE DAME. FROM THE ETCHING BY CHARLES MERYON

a dashing musketeer of the King into an abbe, or Clive Newcome and his good old father, the Colonel, stepping softly and musing on the mighty past of which the cathedral is the symbol with a proper reverence and awe, or listens to the mutterings of the Great Jacquerie, the theme of Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*, mutterings that, swelling into a clamor of fury, were to convert for a period Notre Dame into a Temple of Reason, or follows Du Maurier's delightful *Knights of the Brush* thrilling to its beauty and its art, or any of a score, a hundred more. Notre Dame de Paris is France's national glory. It is also the glory of a literature that is not exclusively French.